

Project A-ko: The Crossing

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Summary: A young scientist, down on his luck from a lost love, decides to bust through the fourth wall by building what he calls "The Crosser", a device that allows him to cross the dimensional boundary.

He crosses into the world of A-ko, B-ko, and C-ko, and hilar

Project A-ko: The Crossing

Project A-ko: The Crossing (Points A, B, & C)

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(I. Transport)

A dark, ominous sky hung overhead, hiding it's Promethian fire for the moment. It was what Michael Banks had been waiting for for weeks. The eccentric young man moved with a hurried pace to set up a lightning rod on his roof, to collect any of the precious electric energy that God would feel adequate to distribute. His semi-long black hair waved in the increasing winds, his steel gray eyes not hiding their excitement. What was it that had set this 17-year-old amateur scientist on alert?

It was his own invention. He'd always loved the idea of folding space-- he'd read about it in countless sci-fi novels, and he'd turned the idea around in his head countless times. It seemed, to him, that the idea was sound; and it could even be done simply, and to do more than just travel from point "A" to point "B".

What about a previously un-mentioned "Point C"? A "Point C" that didn't exist in the same space occupied by "A" and "B"? In theory, one could fold space so far, as to create a "spacial bridge" in between to realities, or dimensions. Furthermore, a machine capable of such could be built into something the size of a refrigerator.

That was what had set off Michael Banks.

Speaking from a purely attention span point of view, it wouldn't be wise to go into its exact workings right now. However, its one key element was a long-cut emerald, about five inches long. Michael had just finished aligning it deep inside the machine-- which he called "The Crosser"-- before he set up the only device able to provide power for the experiment, the lightning rod.

Enduring the increasing rain and wind, Mike set up the rod and descended from his roof, entering through his bedroom window. A little soaked but not daunted, he checked the computer readouts for The Crosser. All systems were good, and the emerald was aligned.

All he needed now, was a target. Something for the spacial bridge to enter. Something caught his eye, a video tape on his dresser... it was slightly worn, indicating that it had seen a bit of use. It was one of his favorite movies, a bit of a comedy, but it held a beauty that most did not. It was also an adventure film, but it was a bit to fun to be a *true* adventure film. It was an Anime film.

It was "Project: A-ko".

Mike smiled to himself. If this worked, he would actually meet A-ko Magami... and maybe even B-ko Daitokuji... two of the more beautiful women of the art. And C-ko... well, she was her own entity. He'd still love to meet her. But how to target The Crosser?

He did it the simplest way he knew: He placed the video under an ocular that he had installed in The Crosser. That was it, or so he hoped. The way he reasoned, if something gathered enough attention from people, enough mental energy would forge a new dimensional plain on which it existed. Theoretically, The Crosser could lock onto that as an energy source as easily as it could an electrical current. In theory.

Now all he needed to do was ready himself. He sat down near the refrigerator-turned-Crosser, attached a variety of cables to his person, and readied himself for transport. In theory, these would take his atoms and fold them properly to go into another dimension. In theory.

He sat and waited. While doing so, Mike pondered what had brought him thus far: he'd been separated from his long-time girlfriend for nine months now... he'd counted every one of them. She'd run off with some rich-looking man from New York, and he was left alone. In his despair, he filled his life with science, devoting every spare moment to researching The Crosser and building it. And now he was sitting there, waiting for the lightning bolt that would carry him into history. In theory.

That was when the lights went off, and a boom resounded through his home. The machine beside him began pulsing with life, and he tensed up in readiness. He saw the lasers and other energies reflect through the emerald inside, beginning the process of folding the fabric of space itself... in theory.

The energies carried into the wires, and began to accelerate his atoms, to transport them across the "spacial bridge"... in theory.

Eventually, the energies reached their peak, and with a flash of light, space would be folded... in theory...

But the theory... was real...

(II. Arrival)

The sun shone brightly over Graviton City, warming the inhabitants of the crater. A soft giggling came across the gentle breeze, followed by its generator. Prancing happily up a road came a young blond girl, the breeze blowing her brown skirt. The large daisies in her hair reflected her overall happy personality, and her bright green eyes showed her barely contained glee.

It was C-ko, on her way to see her best friend, A-ko. After a few more skips she ended up at A-ko's doorstep, and pressed the doorbell, waiting. After a few seconds, she pressed it again, a bit agitated. Finally, she blurted out at the door itself, "A-ko! Hurry up!"

In another few seconds, an upstairs window opened up, and the red-headed form of A-ko poked her head out, pulling her shirt on. "I know, I'm on my way, C-ko!", she yelled down to her friend.

She was cut short, however, from a sudden blast from within her own room. With a yell, A-ko tumbled out of her window and landed on the lawn, her room filled with a radiant light. C-ko helped her friend up, and the two looked as a bright cone of light filled A-ko's room. The cone was strange... it seemed to be a bending of light and space... but not like a mirror bends... it seemed to bend in on itself.

After a few seconds, the light suddenly stopped. With a loud boom, the cone of "bended space" disappeared, and a loud *thud* resounded from within. Thinking quickly, A-ko grabbed her friend's arm and jumped into the window, not expecting to find what they did.

It was a young man, not much older than they, who was soaked from head to toe. He looked weak, also, and A-ko thought of calling for help.

But how would she explain to her parents the presence of a wet young man in her room?

C-ko knelt down beside him. "Ooh, A-ko, I think he's hurt..." she stated, and placed a hand on his forehead. The man stirred, and C-ko jumped back in reflex. He worked his way onto his elbow, and managed to open his eyes. Blinking in the bright sunlight, his first vision was of A-ko... her beautiful form, silhouetted against the rays of sunshine.

"My God..." he said, "I've died..."

A-ko was visibly stunned. "Oh, I hope not... Are you okay?" she inquired.

Mike blinked in more sunlight, until A-ko's form was clear. His face exploded with happiness, and he stood as well as he could, overjoyed that his arrival had been sound. The Crosser had left him a bit sore, however. "Yes!" he said, straining against his uncooperative muscles. "I made it! I made it!"

"Made what? Who are you?" A-ko began demanding. "Here! I made it here! The Crosser works!" Mike continued. "What? Look, just calm down and tell us who you are!"

Finally, Mike stopped jumping and looked around. He explained himself excitedly as he examined his surroundings. "My name is Michael Banks... and I'm a scientist from what appears to be another dimension. I came here seeking..." Mike paused as he thought over just what he WAS seeking. "Well, adventure, I suppose." "Adventure?" repeated C-ko. "I suppose... I'm not sure WHY I built The Crosser..." "'The Crosser'? What's that?" inquired A-ko. "It's what I used to cross the barrier between our dimensions." "Dimensions?" C-ko chimed out, and Mike only sighed. "Let me explain..." he said.

Over the course of an hour, Mike explained as best he could what The Crosser was and what it did, and a brief past history. He spoke of the basic differences in the two dimensions, but A-ko and C-ko simply couldn't grasp the idea that they were animated to him.

"Funny, we don't FEEL like cartoons..." A-ko commented. "Not cartoons, Anime. It's a special form of the art that has unparalleled beauty." Mike smiled. "But the screen barely does your beauty justice..."

A-ko blushed and C-ko giggled. "That's very sweet of you... but--"

Suddenly, a belfry chimed in the distance. The girls' faces turned into fear. "Oh, crap! We're *really* late!" exclaimed A-ko, and proceeded to grab C-ko's arm. She turned to barrel out the window, but threw a glance back at Mike. Without another word, she grabbed him with her other hand and jumped out, running at near the speed of sound toward the school...

(III. Education)

With her companions flailing behind her, A-ko ran down the road at incredible speed, passing the occasional car. After a few more minutes, they had made their way up the crater wall, and were soon running down the avenue to Graviton High School for Girls. With a screech, they halted at the front door. A-ko spoke to Mike, who was a bit stunned by the trip. "Stay out here for now. We'll talk again at lunch."

Without another word, she took off in the direction of her class. After a few minutes, she arrived red-faced, and attempted to think up an excuse for Miss Ayumi.

Meanwhile, Mike poked around the various areas of the campus, and even hid somewhere to watch one of the gym classes work out.

Peeking out from his shrubbery hiding place, he caught sight of a group of sophomores jogging by. He was stunned to finally catch sight of so many beautiful Anime girls... but they were *real*! He could reach out and touch them... but he'd probably be arrested. Still, the idea that they were solid, living, breathing forms began to sink in.

One of the girls bent over to tie a shoelace, and Mike smiled in his seclusion. 'I'm gonna *like* this dimention!' he thought, and watched the various classes come and go...

But back in class (after A-ko and C-ko had been written up), Miss Ayumi began the day's lesson. "Now, yesterday, we looked at how transcendentalism has an effect on our everyday lives. In the poem..."

Miss Ayumi continued on with the lesson. But B-ko, her long, blue hair smelling of a faint floral odor, leaned to the side to talk to C-ko. "Did A-ko make you late again?" she whispered. "Oh, no..." C-ko responded, keeping as quiet as was possible for her. "Some man woke up on A-ko's floor. We had to help him." It was B-ko's turn to be surprised. After she turned this in her head for awhile, she leaned to the other side to whisper to A-ko, "What's this I hear about a man on your floor?" A-ko glared at her, but B-ko only returned with a sly smile. "It wasn't like that!" A-ko tersely whispered. "Oh? Then what help did the *two of you* give?" "B-ko, if you think--"

"AHEM!" coughed Miss Ayumi, and the whole class was looking at them. "A-ko, you've done enough by being so late, and B-ko, you're still making up for all of your past tardies! I simply will *not* have you two disturbing class this much! You will both stay after school!"

They both sighed and replied, "Yes, Miss." Ayumi returned to the lesson, but A-ko and B-ko still exchanged looks for awhile before fully settling back on class.

By the time lunch rolled around, Mike had had a pretty good day. He'd watched a few gym shifts, and was quite pleased with the girls of this dimention. "I could get used to this..." he thought aloud. Eventually, he saw A-ko and C-ko stroll out onto the lawn, carrying their lunches. They settled down in the grass, talking about the morning. Mike rustled in his hiding place, and called out to them. "Psst! A-ko!" They saw him. "Mike! Come on out, no one'll get you here!"

Brushing a few leaves off, Mike climbed out of his foliage hiding place and sat beside them on the grass. "Ah, nice to get out of that bush. How are you two?" "Well, A-ko got detention again..." C-ko offered. "Yeah, well, it's not the first, won't be the last." A-ko responded. Mike chuckled. "I don't doubt it. Man, am I starving..." "Well..."

Without ample warning, C-ko produced a fascinating tray of food from her bag. A-ko and Mike, both able to guess its toxic content, recoiled in surprise and fear. C-ko's happy, green eyes only doubled in size, and she looked at Mike excitedly. "Come on! Mouth-watering, huh?"

The fascinating meal was composed of only God knows what, except that the rice portion had a heart design made of soy sauce in it. Mike looked at it and gulped, less than eager to be one of her guinea pigs. "Ah, that's okay... C-ko..." He laughed nervously, "I'm not as hungry as I thought... he-he..." C-ko continued to look at him imploringly. Her sweet green eyes penetrated him, and his defenses fell shortly. There was something in that face that was irresistible, and he cursed her for being so cute. Mike took the tray, against ALL his better judgment, and picked up some chopsticks with hesitation. A-ko couldn't believe what she was seeing. If this guy knew as much as he said he did...

He picked up a morsel of... something... and brought it to his mouth. He glanced up for an out, but C-ko continued to look at him expectantly. Unable to disappoint her (he also knew what THAT would elicit), he brought the food bit into his mouth and closed his lips around it.

He removed the chopsticks and simply let it sit there for awhile. Nothing happened. 'Okay,' he thought, 'So far, so good...'. He then brought his teeth together and chewed softly.

THAT was his mistake.

Within seconds, a cold fire had spread throughout his body, and every nerve within him screamed. His stomach acids seem to double in potency, and his nostrils felt aflame. Chemicals reacted and enzymes engaged, until he felt an intense, burning sensation in his throat and everything in him wanted him to die, just to get it over with.

"Hey, why's your face doing that?" C-ko inquired.

Eventually, he could contain it no longer, and opened his mouth. An intense stream of fire issued forth: gasses ignited and hot, red, flame spewed from his mouth, incinerating a nearby bush. When the flame finally died, Mike fell backwards, dazed and in pain.

A-ko looked at the scene with stunned surprise. C-ko only clapped her hands and giggled. "That was neat!" she exclaimed. "Can you do it again?"

A-ko broke the silence that followed, "I doubt it C-ko. Maybe when he regains consciousness..."

(IV. Developing Interest)

B-ko Daitokuji had not been having a good day. First off, A-ko had made C-ko late again; and during her inquiry into that, she had been assigned to a detention, which she was now serving.

She sat at her desk (seated across the room from A-ko, now), scribbling on a note pad. Oddly enough, an idea had come to her that morning, and it seemed quite clever. She had been looking at her emerald necklace (a recent gift from her father), marveling at its long-cut beauty, when it came to her. What if someone were to run a lazer through it? More over, what if several lazars, of several

wavelengths, were run through it? She ran calculations through her head and wrote them dutifully on the paper. If it was focused in one point intensely enough, it would obliterate a given point... perhaps by folding its own mass within it!

B-ko chuckled softly to herself and looked across the room at A-ko. 'Soon, A-ko,' she thought to herself, 'C-ko will be mine, and you will be gone...'.

In a moment of spite, B-ko spoke casually, "Tell me, A-ko, who was this man on your floor in the morning?" A-ko threw her a hard look. "It's no concern of yours." "Oh? I hear he was also soaked to the bone..." "He was a traveler, alright! He just happened to be there..." "Really? What type of traveler?" "He called it Crossing. Something to do with a special emerald. Now drop it!" B-ko gasped softly. "A special emerald, huh?" "Right. Now, let me do my work! I don't want to get in trouble due to you again!"

B-ko let it hang. She was developing interest in this "traveler" very quickly...

After they had served their detentions, the two girls left the campus and proceeded their separate ways... or so it appeared. B-ko double-backed, and trailed A-ko, C-ko... and oddly enough, a young American man... back to A-ko's house. After the three of them had entered, B-ko quickly attached a note to a nearby rock, and threw the rock into A-ko's open window.

Calling her driver to her location, she managed to drive away before the three occupants could see her. Mike removed the note from the rock and read it aloud.

"Dear Traveler-- Your presence is hereby requested at the Daitokuji Manor tonight for dinner, to discuss a business transaction. Please be at the front gate by seven o'clock. Regards, B-ko Daitokuji", he read. "Well, THAT didn't take long!" A-ko said. "What do you mean? How did she know about him?" C-ko inquired. "Oh, I mentioned him in detention. I suppose she wants to check out the new arrival..."

Mike pondered this. Sure, A-ko was the heroine, but in the end, a night with B-ko wouldn't be bad at all! She may have been the "bad girl"... but... hey, that was all he needed!

"Well, I'll definitely go. I mean, I've always wanted to meet her." A-ko threw him a look. "Really?" "Yeah. Well, she's the bad girl, I know, but I want a well-rounded trip."

A-ko seemed to turn that over in her head. Mike was cute, in that rogue sort of way. He *certainly* wasn't Prince Charming, though. And yet, there was something intense about B-ko having dinner with him...

"I have an idea!" Exclaimed C-ko. "I know what A-ko's thinking, because I'm probably thinking the same thing! I'll go with him, so B-ko will be distracted enough between the two of us to not do anything!" A-ko was stunned. It was one of the first ideas of C-ko's that had merit. "I don't know, it would be dangerous for both of you do be there..." "Aw, come ON, A-ko! We can protect each-other, right Mike?" "Uh, sure. I'm not superhuman like you, but I'm not helpless,

either. I'll protect C-ko." "Well... I don't know..." A-ko began. "Pleeeese?" C-ko pleaded.

Apparently, A-ko couldn't resist those eyes, either. "Well, okay, but be VERY careful, okay?" "Hoo-Ray!" C-ko exclaimed. "I'll pick out a dinner dress, and we'll get you a suit, Mike!"

Mike quickly re-evaluated himself. 'Yep,' he thought, 'I'm nuts.'

B-ko looked at the dinner she had set out. The most excellent food, a good band, and a lovely night to eat under. If this guy wasn't married-- hell, even if he *was*-- B-ko was certain to get his help.

She stopped to examine herself in a mirror, laid in her living room wall. She had selected a flowing, shimmery black evening gown, cut on the leg and low cut at the bosom to be provocative enough. Her blue-grey hair retained its normal curl, which had attracted many men alone.

With a pleased smile, she turned to her main hench-girl, Asa, who was also adorned in an evening gown (but not *quite* as well done as her mistress). "Asa, make sure that A-ko isn't following him. I won't want any interruptions at dinner." "Yes, ma'am. I'll be sure to have Mari stand guard" Asa replied, referring to the large, masculine young woman who acted as group bodyguard. Mari was the only one whose strength could compare to A-ko's (well, without mechanical help), and was their first line of defense.

Asa turned and walked away, only to bolt right back into the house minutes later. "Mistress B-ko! There is a young man at the gate--" "Good, send him in." "Mistress!! C-ko is with him!"

That caught B-ko off guard nicely. "C-ko?! Why would she be here?" she exclaimed, and ran to a security monitor. It was focused on the main gate, and sure enough, it showed a young man in a dinner suit accompanied by C-ko in a pink formal gown. B-ko held her breath for a moment.

'C-ko...' she thought to herself, 'My God, she's radiant... and that man...' She focused on Mike's features. 'Not a bad specimen, either....'

She rounded on Asa, "Well, why are you still standing there?! Send them in!" "Yes, Mistress!" Asa exclaimed, and ran out to the main gate. After B-ko was certain they had entered, she elegantly strolled out onto the patio, certain that the moonlight caught her dress and eyes in an enchanting way.

"Greetings, Traveler. And C-ko, how wonderful of you to join us!" she began, simply overflowing with congeniality. "Please, won't you both sit down?"

Within seconds, another place had been set for C-ko (and Mike's place was moved to the side a little, the servants knew that their mistress wanted to sit across from C-ko), and they were ushered to their places at the elegant patio table. A red wine was already being poured by the time B-ko said, "Please, tell my cooks to make anything you want. They are the best anywhere, and can make anything."

"Well..." C-ko said, considering. "Do you have any Cordon Bleu? I'd make it myself but--" "--But she forgot her cook book..." Mike said, finishing with a soft laugh. "I'm sorry we've not met, Miss Daitokuji, My name's Michael Banks." Mike reached out a hand, and B-ko placed it within his. Her wrist was bent slightly, and Mike remembered enough etiquette to not shake her hand, but instead planted a soft kiss on it. B-ko was amazed that anyone remembered that anymore, but did not show it. Instead, she replied, "Charmed. You seem to know about me, though." Mike released her hand, "That's true enough. I know that you're a robotics genius, and your family is the richest in Graviton City, much less the country."

"True, but money does not always bring happiness..." B-ko said, and glanced at C-ko, who was looking at the extravagant surroundings with awe. "So I have heard. And, not to sound ungrateful, why have you called me here?" Mike said, trying to downplay her obvious distraction to C-ko. "Well, A-ko says you are a bit of an emerald expert." "To a degree. What has she told you?" "That you travel using them. Tell me, do you know how an emerald can be used as a weapon?" "It is conceivable. Refracting the right types of light and radiation through it, magnifying them. It can even be used to bend and fold space." "I see. Tell me..." B-ko drew this out by picking up her wine glass and taking a sip from it, "For the beam from this emerald to absolutely vaporize something... perhaps even cause it to implode, as you suggest... how would the emerald have to be cut?"

Mike cracked a smile as plates of appetizers were brought out. "You're a lovely hostess, Miss Daitokuji..." He took a shrimp from a nearby plate and consumed it. "And your food is wonderful, but we both know how you'd use that knowledge." B-ko only returned the smile. "Perhaps I can persuade you to give me the proper dimensions for that emerald, anyway." She ran her finger around the rim of her glass and looked at him seductively. "The rewards for working for me can be... quite..."

She let it hang. "I'm sure they can be." Mike said, simply radiating cool. "But I also know that lives hang in the balance." "But you're a traveler. What you do has no bearing on your home." "True, but I place a bigger value on life than some. Do you have any idea how many people were injured or killed during your last major battle with A-ko?" B-ko sat back. "How did you know about that? No one ever knew it was us..." Mike smiled slyly. "I know many things about you..."

B-ko also smiled. 'This man has much information I need,' she thought to herself, 'And I'm prepared to get it out of him any way possible.' She would have pressed the matter, only C-ko had just noticed the band, who were playing a slow, relaxing song. "Ooh! Can they play a song for me, B-ko?" she asked. B-ko, immediately snapping to serve her, responded, "Oh, absolutely! Just tell them any song, they're quite good!" "Oh. Well, can you recommend?"

B-ko smiled, and winked at the female singer on the makeshift stage. The singer winked back at her, and the electric piano began playing a slow song. The drummer started playing, keeping a slow and steady beat.

Mike immediately recognized it as "In Your Eyes".

C-ko stared transfixed at the band, amazed at the wonderful song.

Then, B-ko, acting largely on impulse, stood and walked over to C-ko, unsure of why she was about to do... what she was about to do. "Would you like to dance, C-ko?" she asked.

Mike looked at them both, unable to hide a smile. This was something he'd read about in countless fanfics, but now it was actually happening. The reaction from C-ko was somewhere between odd curiousness and shy eagerness. C-ko wasn't really sure how to react, so she just let the same instinct take her away that she always did. She stood up.

B-ko was silently stunned, but she didn't let it show. C-ko was only the slightest bit surprised, but she dismissed the negative emotion as she did most negative thoughts. B-ko seized the moment to take C-ko's hand, something else that neither of them suspected. B-ko led her out onto an empty section of the patio, and again being "carpe diem", took the lead position in a slow dance.

Mike watched on with wonder. This was something that teenage fanfic authors always played out onto their computer screens, but he thought it would never actually get this far. Yet it was. B-ko and C-ko were slow dancing, and he was there to see it.

The singer began the song, its ethereal beauty carrying on the evening breeze:

"Looking in your eyes... How I hope that you will see my heart... That our lives will meet... never have to part..."

The singer continued into the second verse as B-ko whispered down to her dance partner, "How do you like all of this, C-ko?" "It's beautiful, B-ko. Did you really do all of this for Mike?" C-ko whispered back. "Yes.. but I'd do it for you in an instant."

Watching from a distance, Mike wondered what they were talking about. He listened to the third verse of the song, letting it carry him:

"Standing in the dark... Wanting only to be next to you... Shine your light on me... nothing else will do..."

The fourth verse carried the same deep emotion:

"Deep inside my heart... I believe that you and I could be... Friends forever more... through eternity And you'd see-- Me forever in your eyes..."

B-ko and C-ko were dancing fairly close together now... B-ko taken in by this irrational feeling for C-ko, C-ko being taken in by the odd excitement she felt at dancing with her. B-ko had been something akin to an enemy for so long, and now, she was slow dancing with her.

The irrationality of it only partly reached C-ko, as she simply fed off the sensation. It was exciting, a sensation she could relate to.

So the two of them simply danced the song through, and when the ethereal music trailed off at the end, it took them a few seconds to

separate. The two looked at each other and C-ko giggled. B-ko only smiled and led her back to the table, Mike smiling broadly.

Mike's grin did not go unnoticed by B-ko. "And what are you smiling at?" "You two. If you only knew about where I came from..." Mike responded. "Oh? And where is that?" "I'd rather not say. But, uh, about that emerald..." B-ko sat up, "Yes?" "I have conditions on which I would give it to you." "That's to be understood. What are they?" "First, I need to build another Crosser, to get home. If the Daitokuji Financial Group will pay for that, then I will cut the proper emerald for it, and leave. The upshot of which is: the emerald will also be the proper cut you need for your weapon-- and I do know that's what you need it for-- so when I'm gone, you can keep the emerald. Does that sound good?" B-ko smiled and extended her hand. "I would love to do business with you, Mister Banks." she said, believing she'd just won. He took her hand and gave it a gentle shake. "And I you, Miss Daitokuji." he said, believing the same thing.

B-ko picked up her wine glass and Mike followed suit. "To business!" B-ko said in toast. "To business!" Mike replied, and they tapped glasses. Mike took a drink of his wine, and looked over to see C-ko playing with her food. 'I'm gonna get the best out of this dimention,' he thought, 'and leave it a better place...'

(V. Construction)

A few days passed. Mike had managed to hole up in A-ko's attic, and was becoming good at coming and going without being noticed. He drew up some of the plans for another Crosser, and B-ko's people began construction on it. He was in A-ko's room drawing up another blueprint when the girls came home one afternoon, lightly bickering.

"You did WHAT?!" he heard A-ko exclaim from the hall. "Well, I know it sounds weird, but I danced with B-ko..." C-ko shyly said as they walked in. "And you're JUST now telling me this?! It's been days, C-ko--" "I know..." A-ko frowned. "Did she force you into it? Ohh, that B-ko..." "No, A-ko..." A-ko looked at her with a sort of stunned mix between anger and surprise. "No?" "No. I went along with it."

The room fell silent. A-ko was in definite surprise, now. "W-what?" she said, barely able to speak. C-ko looked down. "I don't know why I did, I just *did*. I know she wants me for herself and I know she wants to kill you... but..." A-ko frowned again. "But what?" C-ko looked at her, her big, green eyes expressing an emotion that A-ko had never seen in her before. "There was this feeling... something exciting about it..." C-ko shrugged. "I don't know what it is, but--" "Please! I don't want to hear any more!" A-ko half yelled, and she stomped on over to her bed and sat down.

"Uh, good afternoon, ladies..." Mike ventured. The two girls looked at him, a little chagrined at the display they had just put on. They both muttered a "Hello.", but there was little in it. "A-ko, I was there. Trust me, it wasn't anything serious." he said. "Oh?! Your best friend dancing with your worst enemy? *That's* not serious?!"

A-ko said, rounding on the bed to face him. "Mike, A-ko, please. I don't know WHY I did it." C-ko said, trying to calm them. She turned to A-ko, "Yeah, she's your enemy, but she never wanted to hurt me, did she? Maybe if I tried to like her more, you two wouldn't fight so much." A-ko was stunned. "'Try to like her more'?! C-ko, just the other day you told me--" "I know what I've said about her... and none of it was nice. But after that dinner..." "What is wrong with you, C-ko? She's been trying to kill me for the past few months, and you're actually warming up to her?!"

"Ladies, please!" Mike interjected. "A-ko, can I speak to you, please?" A-ko looked at C-ko for a second longer then nodded, and the two of them walked into the hall, shutting her bedroom door. "Look," Mike began, "I think I know why C-ko's acting this way." "Oh? Was it some kind of mind control machine built by B-ko? That's probably it--" "No. What's happening to her is perfectly natural." A-ko looked at him with quiet curiosity. "She's growing up, A-ko. She's always been a kid, even though she's 16. Now, for some reason, she's growing up." A-ko seemed to ponder this. "Okay, I can understand being attracted to guys and stuff, I know I am, but C-ko? And... and I hope you're not suggesting what I think you are..." "A-ko... take it from me, B-ko's a very influential woman--" "Woman? She's just as old as us 'girls'! And you can't be suggesting that C-ko's *actually* attracted to... to..." "To B-ko, and yes, it's possible." "How? Why?" "Why does anyone become interested in the same sex? Psychology can't tell us, and perhaps it shouldn't. Love is love, A-ko." "But this isn't love! It can't be!" "It very well may be. But, I do have an idea. I'll need a blood sample from C-ko to be sure." A-ko raised an eyebrow. "A blood sample? Why?" "I don't know... just a feeling I have..." "Well, you're welcome to it..." A-ko gave a wry smile, "Assuming *you'd* be willing to use the needle on her..." Mike swallowed hard. "I'll let a doctor do it..."

They both laughed. Mike was certain he'd not convinced her, but he wasn't convinced himself. All he knew was that SOMETHING was happening to C-ko, and he was determined to find out.

A few more days passed. B-ko sent messages telling Mike that the Crosser was only a few days away from completion, construction was going well. She made repeated requests for the emerald, and he sent repeated replies: "When it's done." C-ko seemed less amorous for B-ko, but something was still there that had not been before Mike's arrival. After much fuss and tears, they did obtain a blood sample, and Mike looked at the results. Something had stimulated C-ko's various glands, and she was going through a stage that she had apparently been latent in coming to. While she had reached physical maturity largely on time, she had been lacking the mental maturity to be interested in anyone.

Moreover, Mike had a theory that his arrival somehow stimulated this change. He couldn't fully explain it, nor did he expect to in the near future. He just intended to keep a close eye on B-ko, lest she try to take advantage of C-ko in this state.

A few days later, Mike finally visited the Daitokuji Mansion, where the construction was taking place. It was a haphazard job: parts laid strewn about, various construction workers were scratching their heads and looking at the blueprints Mike had provided, and B-ko was yelling at all of them. "You morons! Do I have to build the whole thing myself?!" she exclaimed, and threw a blueprint to the ground.

"'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown'..." Mike said, strolling up to her. B-ko then tried to regain composure, "Why, Mister Banks, what brings you here?" "Just seeing how construction was coming along..." he took a second to survey the equipment, "And apparently, it's not." "Just a few minor delays, I'm sure." B-ko said, trying to charm Mike as she had seen her father do countless times with business partners. "'Minor'? I wouldn't call this minor! I gave you exact blueprints! It should have taken a week at most, it's been a week and a half!" "As I said, there've been a few minor delays..." she threw a glare at the workers, "Involving labor management... but we hope to have this resolved in no time." "I hope so. Good day, Miss Daitokuji."

Mike left the mansion shaking his head. It took him far less time than he was giving her to build the Crosser. She was up to something, he decided, and he hoped to find out before it was too late.

One day (the day before the Crosser was due to be completed), B-ko made the boldest move she had to date-- she asked to eat lunch with A-ko and C-ko. The two friends looked up from the lawn they were sitting on, then at each other. A-ko tried to calculate whether or not B-ko was wearing her power suit under her regular clothes, and she would have bet that she was.

Despite her friend's obvious concerns, C-ko nodded. B-ko then uneasily sat down and signaled her attendants to lay her lunch tray down. Asa ran in and laid out an expensive looking tray of food in front of her mistress, then ducked out again. A-ko could only marvel at how she was able to order her underlings around like that. 'Perhaps that's how she's pulling in C-ko...' she thought to herself.

"I'm glad you let me eat with you. I want to make amends for what I've done, A-ko." B-ko said, daintily unwrapping some silverware. "Make amends? You?!" A-ko said, quite in disbelief. "That's right." B-ko looked down at her food, partly out of necessity to see it, but mostly from emotion. "The fact is, we both want C-ko to be our friend--" "I know what you want! You want--"

"Please! Can't we just eat?" C-ko said, desperately trying to maintain calm. Her eyes looked tear-swollen... but she wasn't crying.

THAT struck A-ko and B-ko as the strangest thing to happen yet.

"I don't want you two to fight now, okay? A-ko, as my friend, promise me!" A-ko threw a hard look at B-ko, but eventually broke the stare. "I promise..." she said. "B-ko! If you like me as much as you say you do, then promise me you'll eat lunch in peace!" B-ko glared at A-ko, but eventually, her features softened. "I promise..."

C-ko seemed satisfied, and turned her attention back to her lunch. There was a second or so of glaring between A-ko and B-ko, but eventually, they all began eating, keeping silent. 'Is this the start of a truce?' A-ko wondered. 'Yeah, and 'D' will be model of the year!'

Finally, the following day, the Crosser was completed...

(VI. Deception)

Mike, A-ko, and C-ko approached the Daitokuji Mansion with caution. This was not undue, for Mike was carrying the emerald that B-ko so badly wanted. When they had finally cleared the gate, however, Mike was amazed at the scale that B-ko had chosen to build the Crosser at. It stood almost two stories tall, and looked nothing like the hollowed-out refrigerator he'd used to come here.

There was also something about it that seemed vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place it. It was almost mecha-like, but nothing he could put his finger on. Soon, he, A-ko, and C-ko, were herded closer to the Crosser by Mari and B-ko's other minions, unsure of what B-ko had up her sleeve. A-ko was sure it was nothing good.

After a few tense minutes, B-ko walked out of the mansion and strolled casually up to them. There was a sly smirk on her face, and she carried an air of victory about her. B-ko was believing she had already won, but Mike knew better. She stood close to him, but a respectable distance from A-ko. "Glad you could make it, Mister Banks. Do you have the emerald?" "Of course..."

Mike opened up the briefcase he was carrying to reveal a long-cut emerald, seemingly perfect in its precision cutting. "Oooh! It's pretty!" C-ko exclaimed. "Yes..." B-ko said, still staring at it, "And very, very useful. Would you position it please, Mister Banks?" B-ko produced a remote control of some type from her pocket, and pushed a button on it. A glass compartment opened, revealing the proper frame for the emerald, on the Crosser. Slowly and deliberately, Mike positioned and aligned the crystal. After he shut the glass cover on the "Heart" of the machine, a soft chuckling arose from B-ko. She stormed for the Crosser, but not before pushing a button on the remote she was holding.

Lights of various types began to refract through the crystal, and the machinery inside of the Crosser began to grind to life. Two solid supports (that had previously appeared to be just that) on the bottom of the machine began to extend, and it shot up into the sky. B-ko jumped onto the side of the machine as it did so, and she rode it while the large transformation took place.

The machine grew in size tremendously, and appendages began to sprout from its sides. It attained a rounded form that stretched five stories into the sky, and Mike then realized where he had seen it from.

It was a smaller version of the "Queen Margarita". The same machine that B-ko had built in "A-ko 2: Plot of the Daitokuji Financial Group." Only now, he was REALLY there, and REALLY in danger.

"Oh, my..." C-ko emoted, and A-ko only gulped. Mike looked at A-ko with a determined face, "I need to get inside that thing!" "What?! We need to get out of here!" A-ko said, not wanting to be vaporized. "We'll be okay as soon as I can get inside that thing! Now will you help me?"

A-ko looked at him with a mix of emotions. Finally, she mentally conceded and took his arm. "Get ready!" she exclaimed, and Mike

braced himself. With a flex of her adroit muscles, A-ko had sent them both into the air in front of the Mecha, flying to it's head in a matter of seconds. They stood on its shoulder for a second, but were soon convinced that they should not be; an intense lazer beam shot out from one of the eyes, narrowly missing them.

A passing bird was unlucky enough to be in the path of the light beam, and it caught it squarely. All present expected it to explode or something, but instead, a great blue coronal discharge built up around it, and with a great BOOM, the bird was gone. Imploded.

B-ko's voice boomed from the mecha, "Alright, A-ko, I'm giving you one last chance: Give me C-ko, or you and your friend are history!"

Instead of a response, A-ko charged the head. Mike ran also, pulling out a pistol-- he had gotten it from Spy D, on the grounds that he would use it to protect C-ko-- and he fired a few shots at the lazer's optics. One of his shots hit the mark, and it spidered the optic, sending small lazars everywhere.

Points on the ground that had contact with the beams imploded into small craters, and a bit of the Mecha's own shoulder disappeared into nothingness. Mike saw this and jumped in, yelling after A-ko, "Come on!" A-ko took a few punches at the other lazer optics, but decided it a far safer option to follow Mike inside.

With a solid THUD, they landed inside the mecha. Just as Mike had suspected, many of its parts held hollow service tunnels. If he was further correct, these would lead directly to the Crossing chair.

After a few minutes of crawling through tunnels, however, A-ko and Mike found themselves tumbling through the darkness...

The General had been having an overall good day. Graviton City had been quiet, and he was glad. He had just finished putting the second coat of wax on his Daitokuji Interceptor Special Reserve Golden Cherry Blossom Mark-III (or Marilyn, as they were often called), and he was relaxing in the midday sun. He adjusted his hat as he relaxed, happy that he'd gotten time off for a change.

His reverie was broken, however, by a crackle from the radio on his "Marilyn": "This is Observer 12, calling Central Command. A large Mecha has been sighted in the vicinity of Uptown. It appears to be 'Margarita' class. Please advise."

The General sat up with a start. "Margarita class..." he uttered to himself. Daitokuji had built one of those damnable things with Defense funding...

He jumped to the radio, "This is the General in charge of Defense! Deploy interceptor units! Wipe out that Mecha!" he turned off the microphone, "Now, Daitokuji, we'll get our money back!"

"A missile?!" A-ko exclaimed. "Why? Why would the Defense force be firing at us?" Mike looked at the outside monitor he'd discovered again, also in disbelief. They were crowded close together in the small access corridor, A-ko peering anxiously over his shoulder to

see the monitor. Several Interceptors were closing in, and the explosion that they had felt was one of their missiles.

"We haven't much time..." Mike stated, and set the monitor down. He turned to A-ko, "I need to get to the center of this machine." "Why is that? Why are we in here, anyway?" "Because, I'm sure B-ko didn't deviate from the design that much. I planned for this deception, and I have a counter one in mind. I just need to get to the Crossing chair, which I believe is in the center."

A-ko looked at Mike with a bit of hurried anger. She'd put up with all his odd behavior since he'd arrived, and was beginning to get tired of it. "Listen," she began, "I'm getting sick and tired of all these things you've gone and done and you never said a thing to me! You barely told me anything about you building the other Crosser, and I find out three days after the fact that B-ko's funding it! Now, tell me what the hell you intend on doing?"

Mike was surprised, to say the least. He'd never seen this kind of emotion from A-ko in person, only back home, watching her. Something else occurred to him. From a distance, back home, he'd always admired the beauty of her animation... her form and poise. It was just something he liked to look at... but now, seeing her here...

"Now quit staring at me and get us somewhere!" she exclaimed. "Sorry," Mike started, "We need to get to the core..."

Mike and A-ko once again began their decent, knowing all too well that the closing Interceptors were ready to fire...

----- (VII. Untimely Romance)

Another furious blast rocked the Mecha, and B-ko was struggling to keep control. The cockpit of the machine was small, and VERY uncomfortable. She knew that, in the machine's cavernous interior, roamed A-ko and that meddling traveler. Mister Banks had been a profitable business partner thus far, but she was very close to dissolving that partnership... permanently.

An Interceptor passed too close to her, and the Mecha's Auto-Tracking Lazer vaporized it. She was actually regretting some of these actions-- the deaths of these pilots weren't part of the plan. She had only wanted to terrorize A-ko into giving up C-ko, so why was the Defense force attacking her? She then remembered how her father had sold them the original "Queen Margarita", on which this Mecha was based. How big a mistake had she made by shaping this one like that?

She remembered how much the General hated her father, then, and realized the size of her folly.

"Asa!" B-ko called into the radio, "Have you detained C-ko?" "Yes, mistress," Asa responded, "but..." "But *what*, Asa?" "... She's not fighting, mistress."

That caught her off-guard. Why was C-ko suddenly warming up to her? It had been a strange day.

Meanwhile, in the massive interior of the Mecha, A-ko and Mike were getting steadily closer to their goal. They could feel the pulsing of the Mecha's core, which was being fueled by the emerald. A-ko felt compelled many times to ask Mike why he let B-ko have the crystal in the first place; if he knew as much about them as he said he did...

The Mecha rocked furiously for a moment, and A-ko was thrown on top of Mike. The wind knocked out of them, they simply laid there for a moment, and Mike looked up at A-ko. 'When I get back,' he thought, 'no one's gonna believe me...'

A-ko looked down at Mike. He was cute, in a rough sort of way, but normally had never seen him like this. It was as if something in her knew this was an untimely romance, and couldn't have cared less. What the hell was happening to her? The same thing as C-ko? She tried her best to think logically, but found herself swept in the moment.

For no apparent reason at all, she kissed him.

"A-ko! Please..." Mike said, once the kiss was over. "This isn't right. Once I leave, everything-- you, C-ko, everything-- will be back to normal again. As much as I want to... WORK with you... we have to save C-ko and the city, first."

A-ko was disappointed, but for no reason she could finger. Mike was disappointed with himself, for purposely letting her go. This was what every A-ko fan had always wanted, and he was turning it down. Par for the course, he'd figured. This had been a strange trip.

Reluctantly, the two once again started down the access tubes.

Down on the ground, C-ko was actually thinking. Not just moving from situation to situation like she normally did... she was ACTUALLY thinking; specifically, about these odd feelings she was having for B-ko. It wasn't love, that she knew of. I *certainly* couldn't be lust... could it? She'd never been with a boy, much less a girl. There was no way in her mind that she could be having these feelings.

It had been a strange day. And this unreasonable and untimely romance was making things more than confusing for her. C-ko tried not to look at the devastation being caused around her and fiddled with the daisy in her hair. She concentrated on the simple thing, wishing she could think simply again...

----- (VIII. Return of All)

A-ko gave an access hatch a good shove, sending it flying across the room. Mike peeked his head inside, and his suspicions had been confirmed: B-ko had been accurate enough to put the Crossing chair in the center. The two of them crossed to it eagerly.

"Great! Now we can get you home!" A-ko said. "Right, and stop B-ko in the process!" Mike replied.

Sitting promptly in the chair, there was a tense moment where Mike stared at A-ko. She looked back at him, the same happiness on her

face as he had. A smile slowly crept across Mike's face.

"A-ko, if you want, you can visit sometime." he said. Amidst all the tension, A-ko smiled wider. "I would like that. Very much." Her smile turned into a grin, "And perhaps we can do something about that kiss sometime." "Perhaps. Good luck with B-ko, A-ko. Catch you on the flip side."

With that, Mike touched a red button built into the side of the chair. The room around them suddenly dimmed, power humming through the chair in a new way. Mike tensed up as his muscles tingled with the sudden onslaught of electrical power, and the air around him began to shimmer and crackle. A-ko took a step back as she felt extreme heat radiating from the chair.

The shimmer only grew brighter, until she was forced to close her eyes completely. She let out a sudden gasp as the blue energy corona shot past her, making a hole in a nearby wall. Mike let out a gasp as he felt the energies reach their peak, and with a boom the likes of which no one had ever heard, he flashed out of the dimensional plain...

B-ko gasped as her Mecha suddenly lost power. "What's happening?!" she thought aloud, and a loud, low creaking was heard. She turned to look at the emerald, kept in a jeweled housing behind her, to see cracks forming inside it. Sparks began to ring from all the consoles, and B-ko had to jump away from the controls to keep from being electrocuted.

She let out a low growl. "A-ko! I'll get you for this!" She exclaimed, and with a mighty SMASH, the emerald broke. The Mecha lost all of its power, its great mechanical form grinding to a halt...

"This is Marilyn Nine to Marilyn One! The Mecha's dying!" came the radio call. The barrage of missiles stopped for a moment, and the pilots of the Interceptors took a moment to guess what was going on. The newfound silence was quickly broken, however, by another call.

"This is Command! What did I tell you people?! DESTROY that Mecha!"
"This is Marilyn One. We comply. This will be the final missile..."

C-ko watched the ongoing battle with renewed interest. Something felt rejuvenated again... she felt younger again... and without warning, the giddiness that she'd been missing built to a fever, and she cried out, "Go, A-ko!"

She really felt better.

However, Asa and B-ko's other hench-girls were increasingly of the opinion that they should've been going. This was founded, seeing as when a final missile struck the Mecha with a resounding WHUMP, it began to tip precariously in their direction.

Asa grabbed C-ko and tore off with her, the others not far behind. The Mecha began its quick yet oddly elegant decent, its growing shadow looming ever closer to the escaping crowd of girls. C-ko kept her eyes transfixed on the Mecha, and Asa eventually had to sling her

over her own shoulder to get anywhere.

Fifty feet from the ground, they kept running...

Twenty feet from the ground, a building wind began to push onto them...

At ten feet, Mari felt something metal brush against her flailing pigtails...

And finally, with a massive crash, the Mecha landed, casing soil and, thankfully, all of the girls into the air. After a second or so of flight, they all landed a few feet from the large machine, landing with a CRASH.

C-ko sat up on her elbows, panting slightly. "Wow! That was neat!" She looked around, "But... where's A-ko?"

None of the others could respond, as they were all too busy being unconscious...

The darkened interior of the crashed Mecha smelled of ozone, and A-ko rubbed her shoulder. She had landed hard on it... but WHERE she had landed was something she couldn't gage. Taking a wild guess, A-ko readied her fist in front of her, and leaped straight up, piercing a hole through the Mecha's thick armor. She managed to get a handhold and pulled her self out, blinking in the blinding sunlight.

An exited, high-pitched cheer arose from somewhere beyond the Mecha, and A-ko focused on the approaching figure. "Yay! Go A-ko!" it cried. A-ko smiled. "Thanks, C-ko!" she shouted down. "Say... where did we land?" "Oh, nowhere. Just on B-ko's house!" C-ko responded, giggling.

----- (IX. "Is it just a dream, or is it really real?")

Shaking the fog from his head, Mike looked around. He was sitting in the original Crossing chair, as if nothing had happened. He let out a sigh. His clothing was singed, and the smell of ozone permeated the air. 'I think the whole Cross was a dream...' he thought.

Standing (though his muscles fought this to the bitter end), he worked his way to a table and looked at a chronometer. He furrowed his brow... several days HAD passed...

He emptied his pockets... this turned up a signed picture of A-ko and C-ko, both of them smiling broadly. Mike smiled himself. A song lyric ran through his head, and he couldn't help but sing it aloud...

"Is it just a dream... or is it really real?" he sang softly. Limping to a table, he trailed off into the chorus of "Follow Your Dream"...

----- (Epilogue)

It had been a week since Mike had Crossed back, and things were finally quieting down in Graviton City. The Daitokuji Mansion was being rebuilt, and the girls attended classes as if nothing had ever happened.

That was, until one afternoon.

A-ko and C-ko walked into A-ko's room, chatting idly about the day's events. "I still say that this PokÃ©mon thing won't catch on..." insisted A-ko. "Aw, come ON, A-ko! Pikachu's just so CUTE!" C-ko said, smiling at the thought of the furry little creature.

Their conversation was cut short, however, by a sudden flash-bang from her bed. After recoiling from the initial shock, A-ko and C-ko looked at the new object resting on A-ko's bed. It was a video cassette, clearly marked "To: The Girls, From: Mike".

A-ko, out of curiosity, popped the video in. The clearly roguish form of Mike appeared, but he was vastly different. He seemed more substantial some how... not nearly as brightly colored as he was. He spoke:

"Hello, girls. I just wanted to drop you a line, let you know how I was. I have to admit, my time with you was the most fun I've had in... well, a long time." The image smiled. "I also want you to know that I'm far from done with my encounters with you. Shortly following this message will be a miniature, portable Crosser. Keep it guarded and use it carefully. This does mean, however, that you can visit whenever you wish, and I would like that very much.

"I've also worked out what had caused the odd personality changes. It appears that my presence alerted some extra-dimensional force... some force that carries more power than you and I could possibly imagine. It treated us like characters in a book, seemingly. However, now that I am home, this force should rest. Just expect these changes whenever we meet.

"

"I am willing to except those dangers, if you are. Until we meet again, keep fighting the good fight, and..." Another smile crept across his face, "Follow your dream."

The image flickered and died, and the two friends eagerly awaited the coming Crosser.

NOT THE END....

End
file.